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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

+ Security Council condemns incursions into zone of separation by Croatian Government forces in Sectors North and South and by both Government and local Serb forces in Sector East; expresses deep concern at continuing hostilities in Croatia.

+ Situation in Sector West is described as unstable.

+ Secretary-General leaves Fiji for Japan at end of two-day visit.

+ Third progress report on UNAVEM III is presented to the Security Council by the Secretary-General.

+ United Nations Rwanda Emergency Office in Kigali in latest emergency situation update, says majority of internally displaced persons transported to home communes.

+ There is need to increase role of radio in United Nations peacekeeping operations, Committee on Information is told.

+ Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, continuing in Cairo, concludes discussion on action against economic and organized crime.

+ Critical food shortages and international indifference are threatening lives of more than 1 million of most vulnerable people in Iraq, according to WFP.

+ Unless new funds are swiftly identified, aid programmes for 580,000 displaced people in Georgia and Azerbaijan will be interrupted by end of May, UNHCR declares.

+ Secretary-General condoles death of former President of World Bank, Lewis Preston.

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The Security Council has expressed deep concern at continuing hostilities in Croatia. In a statement Thursday night, read on behalf of the Council, by its President Jean-Bernard Mérimée (France) the Council condemned the incursions into the zone of separation by Croatian Government forces in Sectors North and South and by both Government and local Serb forces in Sector East. The Council demanded that those forces be withdrawn immediately. It also condemned the local Serb bombardment of Zaghreb and other civilian population centres, demanding that these activities cease immediately.

The Security Council further condemned the acts of harassment and intimidation against United Nations personnel and reminded the parties of their obligations to respect such personnel at all times and to ensure their safety, security and freedom of movement. The Security Council called on the parties to cooperate fully with the United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in protecting and assisting the local civilian population and any displaced persons.

The Council expressed its deep concern at reports that the human rights of the Serb population of Western Slavonia were being violated. It demanded that the Government of the Republic of Croatia respect fully the rights of the Serb population concerned in conformity with internationally recognized standards.

The Security Council went on to demand that the parties cease all hostilities immediately, act according to the proposals made to them by the Secretary-General's Special Representative and cooperate fully with him and UNCRO.

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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the former Yugoslavia, Yasushi Akashi and the Force Commander Bertrand Janvier went to Pacrac today in Western Slavonia, according to a United Nations spokesman. They had been forced to call off the visit Thursday, due to heavy fighting in the region. A United Nations spokesman in Zaghreb described the situation in Sector West as unstable.

The United Nations peace-keepers in the region of western Slavonia have also been endangered. The Nepalese battalion was told by the Croatian Army this morning to move out of its base in Pustara in the south-eastern area of the sector. The reason given by the Croatian Army was that the security of the UN personnel could not be assured. However, according to a Spokesman, an order has gone out from UN Headquarters to the Nepalese battalion that they should not move.

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Mr. Boutros-Ghali leaves Fiji on Friday for Japan at the end of a two-day visit to the island nation. While in Fiji, the Secretary-General had meetings with President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Prime Minister Suluweti Rabuka, and members of the Cabinet. He also met with representatives of United Nations agencies in Fiji.

From Japan, Mr. Boutros-Ghali will go on to the Russian Federation.

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The Secretary-General has presented his third progress report on the United Nations Angola Verification Mission, UNAVEM III to the Security Council. Under resolution 976 (1995) the Secretary-General had been asked by the Council to report monthly on the implementation of that resolution. The latest report is an acknowledgement of the progress that has been made and the necessary steps leading the deployment of UNAVEM III. The Secretary-General said in the report, that much more needs to be done.

A UN Spokesman said that the Secretary-General has once again told the parties that he would not hesitate to recommend to the Council that deployment of troops be postponed or stopped if the parties failed to fulfill their commitments under the Lusaka Protocol and the various resolutions of the Security Council. He was particularly concerned about slow progress in demining, the opening of major roads and airfield repair and other vital infrastructure which has to be done before the troop deployment can proceed in an orderly and effective manner.

Meanwhile, the meeting between President Dos Santos of Angola and Mr. Jonas Savimbi will be held on Saturday in Lusaka, Zambia. Mr. Savimbi and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Angola Mr. Aliounne Blondin Beye are already in Lusaka.

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The United Nations Rwanda Emergency Office in Kigali (UNREO) has released its latest emergency situation update. The report said a majority of the internally displaced persons at the Ndera Transit Centre have been transported to their home communes. The report noted that the Government of Rwanda, UN Agencies and NGOs were continuing to provide assistance to the returnees and vulnerable groups in the home communes.

About 300 of the internally displaced people left the Kibeho camp on Thursday, according to a UN Spokesman. Due to rain and bad road conditions, only a trickle have left the camp on Friday. Representatives of non-governmental organizations were allowed to enter the Kibeho camp for the first time yesterday, but were not allowed to bring in food water or medicines. The spokesman said, some hard-core elements remained on the second floor of the building in the medical complex but their numbers were not known.

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There was a need to increase the role of radio in United Nations peacekeeping operations, the Committee on Information has been told, as it continued its general debate Friday. The representative of Japan, citing "Radio UNAMIR" which provides service for peace-keeping in Rwanda, said it was particularly important that the United Nations have its own radio broadcasting capacity in areas where an effective local radio infrastructure did not exist. He commended the Department of Public Information (DPI) for its progress in expanding access to United Nations information on the Internet and other electronic networks.

More funds should be allocated for the information component of peace-keeping operations, the representative of Pakistan said. He suggested that developed and developing countries should share professional expertise and technology to promote a two-way flow of information.

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The Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders continuing in Cairo has concluded its discussion on action against economic and organized crime and the role of criminal law in the protection of the environment.

Under the terms of a draft resolution being considered, the Congress would unequivocally condemn organized crime and terrorism and consider them to be crimes against human rights and basic democratic freedoms, threatening the territorial integrity of States and jeopardizing the stability of legally constituted governments.

The representative of Egypt, introducing the draft, said it was a combination of a Turkish and an Egyptian proposal. The draft would have the Congress request that a code of conduct for combating organized crime and its links with terrorism be drafted by an intergovernmental working group of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

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Critical food shortages and international indifference are threatening the lives of more than 1 million of the most vulnerable people in Iraq, according to the World Food Programme, WFP. A lack of donor pledges had forced the Programme to slash rations and to cut by 50% the number of people receiving assistance. Despite these measures, the Programme said, most food stocks would be depleted by the end of May.

Last year, WFP focused its food aid on 1.3 million nutritionally vulnerable people throughout Iraq. Today only 650,000 people get only seven kilogrammes a month instead of the required 12 kilogrammes while others receive a reduced ration only every other month. They are mainly refugees and displaced persons, the handicapped and the elderly, and orphans. According to WFP for the past two months, the Programme has had nothing to distribute except lentils and flour.

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Francisco Roque Castro, WFP Country Director for Iraq said too many children were dying in Iraq from something as simple as bronchitis. They were so weakened by malnutrition that they could not recover.

To cover relief operations until the end of September, WFP said it urgently needed $24.5 million for food, transport and logistics. However, no donor pledges had been received so far.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared on Friday that unless new funds could be swiftly identified, aid programmes for 580,000 displaced people in Georgia and Azerbaijan would have to be interrupted by the end of May. Donor countries had not adequately responded to UNHCR's fund-raising appeals for 1995 operations in these two countries.

For the 300,000 displaced persons in Azerbaijan assisted by UNHCR, the situation was critical. Of the $8.2 million budget, UNHCR had received only $2.4 million, which had already been depleted on housing, sanitation and income-generating projects.

In Georgia, only 26% of the current year's $9 million budget had been funded. Lack of funds had already forced UNHCR to interrupt several programs, such as the information campaign on landmines, which was principally aimed at educating children who were the main victims of landmines in the area.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has condoled the death of Lewis Preston, who had just retired as President of the World Bank. A United Nations spokesman said the Secretary-General expressed his appreciation for the leadership of Mr. Preston as President of the World Bank which was a specialized agency of the United Nations and for his cooperation with the Secretary-General and the rest of the United Nations system. Mr. Boutros-Ghali extended his condolences to the members of Mr. Preston's family.

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